

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINSHASA 008532

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SUBJECT: KISANGANI OBSERVATIONS AND IMPRESSIONS

CLASSIFIED BY WILLIAM LACY SWING FOR REASONS 1.5 (B) (D)

¶1. (C) The following two-part series reports on Embassy staff member's recent visit to Kisangani, capitol of Oriental Province. Part one addresses the military and security situation, and Part two the political and economic issues facing Kisangani and the province.

¶2. (C) Summary: During visit to Kisangani November 28 to December 1, Emboff spoke to local businessmen, representatives of international and local NGOs, and MONUC officers. Although Kisangani has been calm for months, there has been fighting recently between RCD/Goma and MLC only sixty kilometers north of Kisangani. Most viewed the situation as still inherently unstable and precarious, as access to diamond-rich areas appears to be a major objective of the different local military and political actors. The "governor" of Oriental Province emphasized support of the Lusaka Peace Agreement, the Inter-Congolese Dialogue, and Congolese territorial integrity. He urged the international community to pay more attention to Kisangani given its isolation and desperate economic situation, implying that there was a tendency to favor Goma and Bukavu. The "governor" said that the USG could stop the war if it only wanted to. Civil society reps say the "governor" has only very limited support in Goma.

Nearly all interlocutors in Kisangani had two complaints: (a) that the city had become completely isolated; and (b) that the province as a whole had been "balkanized" to a regrettably large extent. Travel around the province was virtually impossible, the province having become divided into many small "spheres of influence." These divisions had resulted in Kisangani's trade and communications options being cut off eastward as well as westward. Within the city, the problems of Hema-Lendu tension and NGO tax harassment were cited.

The economy of Kisangani is in fairly dire straits, as both eastern and western surface supply routes have been completely cut and diamond trading has moved northward out of the city. What little goods Kisangani is able to import come only via small planes from the east, or, in the case of agricultural produce, by canoe and bicycle. Most of the diamond producing areas remain in MLC territory, and now that the Ugandans have moved north of Kisangani, this trade bypasses Kisangani, passing to Kampala via more northern routes. As the diamond trade has been the basis for Kisangani's economy for some time now, the city's economy has collapsed, and money is in extremely short supply.

Civil Society members expressed gratitude to the US Embassy in Kinshasa for having issued them documents which facilitated their return to rebel areas after attending a civil society conference in Kinshasa earlier in the year. They were also appreciative that someone from the American government had visited, and hoped that this was the beginning of a closer relationship. Finally, they were extremely gratified to learn that the US Embassy was very actively supporting the idea of the establishment of a "humanitarian corridor" along the Congo River between Kisangani and Mbandaka. People proposed that in addition, an extremely beneficial and possibly more practical interim measure would be to broker the opening up of Kisangani and Goma airports to commercial and humanitarian traffic, an initiative that could potentially be monitored by MONUC. End Summary

Military/Security Situation

¶3. (C) Kisangani has not seen any combat in the city proper since the withdrawal of Rwandan and Ugandan regular troops, after three violent confrontations between them in August 1999, and May and June 2000. Notwithstanding, all agree that the security situation remains precarious and that a new round of fighting could break out again at any time--at least between MLC and RCD troops, if not by their respective Ugandan and Rwandan backers. (The population was seriously traumatized by the fighting earlier this year and remains very jumpy-ready to run into the forest with the first sound of gunshots.)

According to MONUC, both Rwandan and Ugandan armies have withdrawn to distances some 100 km from the city of Kisangani, in compliance with accords to this effect. However, as RCD/Goma-appointed authorities continue to

administer Kisangani and the military force in and around the city are "RCD/Goma" troops, Rwanda maintains considerable influence in the city. The local population, in fact, believes that many of the "RCD" troops are actually borrowed RPA soldiers. They claim to see increasing numbers of obviously Tutsi soldiers, especially in the local drinking spots that used to be highly frequented by RPA soldiers when they were living openly in the town. Kisangani residents have difficulty accepting that all these could possibly be "Banyamulenge" (or other Congolese Tutsis) as the RCD claims. Uniforms are of little help in distinguishing soldiers of the different armies at this point, since many RCD troops have now been issued RPA-type uniforms. Having no way of knowing who is Congolese and who isn't, MONUC officers say they have to accept the RCD's explanation that these Tutsi soldiers are Congolese and thus legitimate RCD regulars.

MONUC and local Civil Society groups assert that in many ways, the population was better off under foreign (Rwandan RPA and Ugandan UPDF) army control. RPA and UPDF soldiers were regularly paid, relatively well disciplined, and supervised by a professional officer corps. During that period, the unpaid, less-well supervised and relatively undisciplined RCD did not carry weapons. The RCD troops were, however, issued arms by the RPA at the time of the RPA's withdrawal, and RCD soldiers now largely live off the population, confiscating food and other goods at will, especially in supply areas just outside the city.

4.(C) RCD and MLC Clash

In mid-November, RCD and MLC armies clashed north of Kisangani, on the road to Banalia and Buta. There were reportedly three casualties and some wounded. RCD forces captured approximately fourteen MLC policeman. The skirmishes were apparently the result of an effort by RCD troops to extend RCD control to Bengamisa, a town 48 kilometers from Kisangani and some 18 kilometers beyond the village of Lindi (which had hitherto served as the border areas of RCD control and MLC control). According to MONUC, whoever controls the Bengamisa-Yangambi road is likely to be able to control diamond traffic from the diamond-rich area just north of Yangambi (approximately 100 kilometers west of Kisangani).

Some three hundred RCD troops, many of whom are Tutsi (and believed by the population to be RPA soldiers) suddenly moved considerably north of the city of Kisangani and crossed a river into the area north of Linda--normally territory controlled by MLC police. Capturing MLC police on the other side of the river in a surprise attack, the RCD troops proceeded northward to capture Bengamisa, also protected only by MLC police and headed toward Balaia on the Aruwini River. At kilometer 62, however, they encountered the MLC army, which headed southward from Banalia upon learning of the invasion. Some fighting ensued and went on intermittently for two days. MONUC, which was able to reach the area of the fighting by the second day, had the impression that there had already been meetings between commanders on both sides and that some kind of a cease-fire/pull-back agreement had been reached. This may have resulted from MONUC's earlier communications with RCD/Goma and MLC/Gbadolite alerting their respective leaders of the fighting and high potential for another catastrophic clash of rebel and supporting foreign armies. RPA and UPDF troops reportedly remained at a considerable distance throughout the conflict and did not participate in these skirmishes. In the pull-back agreement, however, RCD appears to have retained control of Bengamisa, the town which may have been their original objective in the offensive. MONUC and the population thus wonder whether the MLC might not at some point try to recover this territory and retaliate in an offensive.

15. (C) Local Attitudes Toward MONUC

There is considerable concern among the international NGO community that MONUC will not be able to help them much if real trouble breaks out. MONUC still has only thirty-five people in Kisangani, and they do not attempt to monitor the left bank of the river at all. Some residents' perception of MONUC as doing little to free Kisangani from rebel occupation leads them to the false conclusion that MONUC favors the RCD and Rwanda. MONUC troops were not very visible in October when the university students went on a rampage in the city over school fees (which included throwing rocks at some of the headquarters of international NGOs.) The international NGO community found itself largely on its own to attempt to ascertain what was happening.

